

Mr J Charlesworth
"The mighty dead
"Who blessed mankind and humanised the world."

THE CHRISTIAN FREEMAN

AND

Record of Unitarian Worthies

BEING A HISTORY OF THE UNITARIAN REFORMATION OF RELIGION IN EUROPE AND AMERICA
DURING THE LAST THREE HUNDRED AND FIFTY YEARS.

With some Account of the most Notable Works written by Unitarians.

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ICELANDIC HISTORY.

BY AN ICELANDER.

"Iceland shone with glorious lore renowned,
A Northern light, when all was gloom around."

MONTGOMERY.

THE thousandth anniversary of the first settlement of Iceland has had the attention of the whole world during the past month. An Icelfander has sent us the following, which we gladly place before our readers:—"If we can believe the Irish monk Dicuil, the Irish were the first discoverers of Iceland, about the year 800. As, however, the Irish did not make any permanent settlement in Iceland, their discovery of it has no practical signification. It is worth observing that the Irish do not seem to have met with any human beings or aborigines when they first discovered Iceland. During the years 860-70 Iceland was discovered by the Norwegians. The two first, Naddoddr and Gardar, were driven to the island by stress of weather, and thus discovered it accidentally. The third, by name Flóki, went on purpose to discover the new land, the existence of which began to be rumoured among the Scandinavians. He went first to Shetland, then to the Faroes. He sailed round the south coast of the island, and into a bay in the north-west of Iceland. There he found abundant fishing, both in the sea and in the rivers. After one winter's stay Flóki returned to Norway, and gave a very poor account of the country which he had discovered. Judging from the accounts given of Iceland in the sagas, there is reason to believe that the island was in some measure more attractive to settlers in the ninth century than it is in the nineteenth. It had excellent pastures, yet Iceland never had sufficient attractions for settlers to go there of their own accord, not even the hardy Norwegians. There were stronger reasons than choice which

made them go to Iceland. It was necessity. They were compelled to leave Norway, and they went to Iceland, because at the time it was the only place within their reach where they could live undisturbed by kings and other evildoers. The man who brought the dominion of Norway under one sceptre was Haraldr Fairhair. He was stoutly opposed by the chiefs. After the decisive battle in 872, in which Haraldr came off the conqueror, all resistance was useless, and Norway was no longer a safe place for those who had been among the king's enemies, or would not yield up their liberty and independence to him. They had to leave Norway. Some went to Shetland, the Orkneys, the Hebrides, the North of Scotland and Ireland. Others went to Iceland. Two foster-brothers, Ingólfr and Hjörleifr, were the first to settle in Iceland. They fitted out a large ship and set sail for the land discovered by Flóki. They arrived in Iceland in the year 874, and established themselves in the island. This was the beginning of the Norwegian settlement in the island. Many Norwegian chiefs who were too proud to submit to King Haraldr followed the example of Ingólfr and went to Iceland. The majority of the settlers came direct from Norway. A considerable number, however, came from the Orkneys, the north of Scotland, and from Ireland. Most of them were Norwegians, who had previously migrated to the west, and in many cases intermarried with Scotch and Irish families. There were also among them several native Irishmen and Scotchmen. It is said of many of the settlers, that before entering upon the hazardous undertaking of going to Iceland, they had a grand sacrificial feast. On these occasions they asked the advice and protection of their gods; and to some extent influenced by the answers of the

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oracle thus consulted, they repaired to the new land, taking with them their household gods, their moveable property and families. When the locality of the settlement had been decided upon, the first thing to be done was to take possession of the land. This was done by going round it with fire, as it was called. A fire was kindled in one place, and then another within sight of the first one, until the whole space intended for occupation was thus surrounded. The chief also built a temple at his residence, placing under its foundations earth from the temple in his old home. He was himself the priest of the temple, and had to keep it in repair, to perform the sacred rites, and to bear the expense of the sacrificial feasts. His retainers, or those who had fixed their abodes within the boundaries of his settlement, were to pay a tax to the temple. They also had to attend their chief and assist him in his quarrels with other chiefs. The settlers in Iceland carried with them to their new homes that unyielding temper and love of fighting which made it impossible for them to stay in their own country. This spirit soon reappeared after their settlement in Iceland. Then they soon felt the want of some more lenient, though perhaps less effectual means of settling their differences than by destroying each other. In the year 929 laws were adopted at a general assembly called *Alping*. Thirty-six years later all these chiefs had seats in the *Alping*, and each of them was to take with him two of his retainers. Thus the whole assembly consisted of 144 members. This assembly had both legislative and judiciary power. A president was elected for three years. He had to recite the laws and to direct the proceedings of the assembly. In all cases of doubtful laws his decision was final. This, then, was the beginning of the Icelandic Commonwealth. In about sixty years all the habitable parts of the island were occupied by settlers. In their new homes they showed the same vigorous character and enterprising disposition as in the old country. Their means of livelihood were very much as they still are, that is rearing of livestock and fishing. Besides, they kept up a frequent and regular communication with the countries from which they came, and made trading trips both to Norway, Great Britain, Ireland, and Denmark. A young man was not thought much of until he had been abroad and acquired fame and fortune. This could not be done by trading only; it was there-

fore a common custom with the Icelanders, when they had disposed of their goods, to go on a viking expedition, and try what they could acquire with the sword in foreign parts. One of the results of the enterprising spirit of the old Icelanders was their discovery of Greenland. Being anxious to draw more settlers there, Eiríkr the Red said, "Let us give the country an attractive name and call it Greenland." Many Icelanders followed his example, and explored the country nearly as far to the North as Europeans and Americans have ever done in later times. During the first decade of the eleventh century they also discovered the mainland of America, and made several unsuccessful attempts to settle on the east coast, south of Newfoundland. Already during the period above mentioned, we begin to notice the peculiar characteristics of the Icelanders, which alone have made them famous and preserved their name in history, their partiality for historical lore and tradition. They had not been long settled in Iceland when it seemed to have become their particular business to preserve to posterity an account of the times in which they lived, and the countries which they knew and visited most frequently. Norwegians, Danes and Swedes owe to the Icelanders nearly all that they know about their earliest history, laws, customs, and religion of their ancestors. This does not concern Scandinavia alone. Both Germany and Great Britain are in a great measure indebted to Icelandic sources for what they know about the religion and customs of their early forefathers. At the time we are speaking of there was indeed no Icelandic literature in the proper sense of the word, as the Icelanders did not know any letters except the old runes, until after the introduction of Christianity, and the runes were never used for literary purposes, either in Iceland or in Scandinavia. However, during this very period, the materials were accumulated of which the historians of subsequent centuries made such an excellent use. Soon after the colonisation of Iceland, Icelanders almost exclusively were the court-poets of the Scandinavian kings. Their poems became the framework of the future sagas. In Iceland itself the deeds of the chiefs, from their infancy to their death, were also carefully preserved in song and tradition. The Icelanders were, however, no less anxious to obtain information from abroad than to preserve the memory of the events that happened with themselves.

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The scalds who visited the courts of Norway, Denmark, Sweden and England were proud of relating the honours heaped upon them by foreign potentates. Thus it is that we find in the Icelandic sagas many detailed accounts of foreign princes. Some of the settlers who came from Ireland and Scotland were Christians, but their descendants soon forgot their faith, and conformed to the religious ceremonies of their neighbours. At a meeting of Alþing, in the year 1000, it was proposed that Christianity should in future be the religion of the land. The heathen party stoutly opposed this proposition. The president of the republic explained the serious consequences to which the disruption of the commonwealth was likely to lead. "If we have not laws and religion in common," he said, "our peace is gone." Such was the persuasive power of his words that both parties promised to keep the laws proposed by him. Then he proposed that all Icelanders should become Christians by being baptised. Sooner than might have been expected Christianity became not only nominally but really the faith of the Icelanders. Instead of fighting each other, as had been their wont, they applied themselves with equal energy to the study of letters, and in this pursuit they became more famous than in their daring undertakings and warlike deeds. But for the literary works of the Icelanders during the three following centuries, their very name would only be known to the visitors to the arctic seas. The first bishops of Iceland were foreigners, but natives were soon found to supply their place. At that time many Icelanders travelled over the greatest part of Europe, and studied at all the principal universities, both on the Continent and in England. The native bishops soon established schools in the island, to which their countrymen eagerly flocked. There was plenty of leisure for such work, as the island enjoyed comparative tranquillity for about two centuries immediately after the introduction of Christianity. Now they began to write down the mythological songs of their heathen ancestors, as well as the sagas which already had been formed in the mouth of the saga-teller and handed down from generation to generation. Towards the end of the twelfth century the peace of the little commonwealth was disturbed by single chiefs who had acquired greater power than the rest. When two or more of such chiefs quar-

relled, they refused to have their differences settled in a peaceful and legal way, and there was no central power to compel them to do so. From the time Iceland was first colonised the Norwegian kings had their eyes upon it with the view of annexing it. Now, when the whole country was in a blaze of civil war, the King of Norway gained his purpose, and Iceland was united to Norway in the years 1262-64. The Icelandic Republic was no more. The history of the Icelandic Republic with all its details is of the utmost importance for every student of the early history of the whole Teutonic race. We shall only notice two points in the history of Iceland from this time, viz., the transfer of the island to the Danish rule in 1380, when Norway was united to that kingdom, and the introduction of the Reformation during the years 1540-51. Like the introduction of Christianity, it met with little resistance on the part of the inhabitants, and ever since they have remained Lutherans to a man. For the rest, the history of the island from its union with Norway down to this time presents a long list of afflictions and calamities, caused by severe seasons, pestilences, famines, and misgovernment. Many times one-fourth and even one-third of the inhabitants have been swept away in a year or two, and we wonder that the survivors did not sink down into utter degradation and helplessness. Instead of that, they have always recovered in a wonderfully short time. Their love of letters never died out entirely. They clung to it through good and evil. Through manifold calamities it was their only comfort. To the old literature it is partly due, and partly to the isolation of Iceland, that the Icelanders have still preserved so many traditions and traces of antiquity, that they are in many respects a living antiquarian museum. It is to be hoped that their thousandth anniversary may be a new starting-point in their better history. Their hearts are at least now full of hope."

The readers of our little serial will be glad to know that an effort is about to be made to publish the works of Channing in the Icelandic language. This work will be in the hands of the most literary man in the island—their best poet. We trust our friends in England will help liberally, that the splendid discourses of the greatest divine of modern times may be freely circulated throughout Iceland.

WAYSIDE GATHERINGS.

TO PARENTS.—There is a good deal of sound wisdom in the suggestion of the farmer: "If you want your boy to stay at home, don't bear too hard on the grindstone when he turns the crank."

DISPLAY OF LEARNING.—Wear your learning, said Chesterfield, in a private pocket, and do not pull it and strike merely to show that you have some. If you are asked what o'clock it is tell it, but do not proclaim it hourly, and unasked, like the watchman.

NO ONE PERFECT.—One day you will be pleased with a friend and the next day disappointed in him. It will be so to the end; and you must make up your mind to it, and not quarrel unless for very grave cause. Your friend, you have found out, is not perfect. Nor are you; and you cannot expect much more than you give. You must look for much weakness, foolishness and vanity in human nature; it is unhappy if you are too sharp in seeing them.—*Country Parson.*

A DIFFERENCE.—A Scotch parson had a farming neighbour who was in the habit of shooting on Sundays, but after a while this Sabbath breaker joined the church. One day the minister to whose church he belonged met a friend of the farmer, and said, "Do you see any difference in Mr. P.—since he joined the church?" "Oh, yes," replied the friend, "a great difference. Before, when he went out to shoot on Sunday, he carried his gun over his shoulder, but now he carries it under his coat."

THE QUEEN AT FAULT.—The *Church Herald* says: "We deeply regret to observe that our most religious and gracious Majesty, the Queen, has thought it consistent with her duty to Almighty God and to the faithful of the ancient Church of England to partake of bread and wine at the so called 'Communion' of the Scotch Presbyterians—an event unparalleled in the history of the National Church." We presume that Victoria does not care what the *Church Herald* thinks or says.

FALSE HUMILITY.—Dr. Watson tells a very good story of Sister Scrub, who was given to hospitality and the very bad habit of running down every thing she had in the way of meat and drink, as if she would by this plan induce her guests to praise them the more. Elder Blunt had endured this fight of afflictions several times, and undertook to put an end to it. "Putting up" at Brother Scrub's one day, his horse was cared for, and he was shown into the best parlour, where everything was nice as a new pin. Mrs. Scrub was sorry her house was upside down, and it wasn't fit for a minister to sit down in, but she was glad to see him, and would try to make him comfortable. Dinner came on, and Mrs. Scrub declared the dinner was so mean and miserable she was ashamed of it, and when she was in full blast with her deprecations, Elder Blunt jumped up, said he couldn't and wouldn't stay in a house where everything was in such a state; he would go where he could find something fit to eat, and a decent place to eat it in. In spite of all they could do, the Elder insisted on having his horse and quitting the house. Sister Scrub wept sore over her fault, and being heartily ashamed and cured, the Elder in due time returned, and ever afterward found a good home with Brother and Sister Scrub.—*Wood's Household Magazine.*

HARD WORK.—"What is your secret?" asked a lady of Turner, the distinguished painter. He replied, "I have no secret, madam, but hard work." Says Dr. Arnold, "the difference between one boy and another is not so much in talent as in energy." "Nothing," says Reynolds, "is denied well-directed labour, and nothing is attained without it." "Excellence in any department," says Johnson, "can now be attained by the labour of a life-time; it is not to be purchased at a lesser price." "There is but one method," says Sydney Smith, "and that is hand labour; and a man who will not pay that price for distinction had better at once dedicate himself to the pursuit of the fox." "Step by step," reads the French proverb, "one goes very far." "Nothing," says Mirabeau, "is impossible to the man who can will." "Is that necessary?" That shall be." This is the only law of success.

AN ADMIRABLE ADMIRAL.—During a terrible battle with the English Admiral Blake, off Dover, the Dutch Admiral Tromp was standing on the deck of his own ship watching the progress of the fight, when one of his sailors hurried past him with a bag of powder. Not recognizing the commander he told him to get out of the way, at the same time giving him a box on the ear which nearly knocked him down. Tromp said not a word, but walked away to a less busy part of the vessel. When the battle was over he called the man before him. The sailor remembered having given somebody a blow, but was terrified to find that it was the Admiral himself. "You need not be afraid, my son," said Tromp, "for you did your duty. Never allow any man to interfere in the execution of your orders; but the next time you hit don't hit so hard." The man was thereupon promoted.

NEARER, MY GOD, TO THEE.—An orthodox editor having discovered that this beautiful hymn is the composition of a Unitarian, goes on to say, "Nearer, my God, to Thee," ought not to be a favourite with Christians! Here are his reasons, which he backs with a column of argument:—1. There is no recognition of Christ in it from beginning to end. Worse than that, there is something in it that seems quite opposed to such a recognition. The sentiment of the hymn would agree very well with the theory of a Deist or Brahmin. But as for anything of a distinctively Christian character, we look for it in vain. 2. The sense of the hymn is below the level of true, earnest worship. It refers too much to experience in dreams, and is altogether too misty and vague. 3. The poetry is not happy; the rhythmic movement is defective, and the construction is strained." How lamentable are the results of prejudice and bigotry—the old cry, can any good thing come out of Nazareth! Surely Unitarians have much to contend with and a great work to do.

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